

in 1951 by Ernest Lewis, and undoubtedly helped to perpetuate a new era of research in 1972, initiated by Bennie Keel and Keith Egloff of the Research Laboratories of Anthropology (RLA) of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. This time, investigations shifted to the Upper Sauratown site in Stokes County, where excavations continued until 1981. Two years later, Jack Wilson, who supervised these excavations from 1975 until 1981, used these findings as a basis for a dissertation. When Roy Dickens became director of the RLA in 1982, a formal program was organized to investigate the impact of European contact on Siouan tribes of North Carolina. After working in other Piedmont river basins, the RLA turned its attention to the Dan River drainage in 1988. RLA researchers H. Trawick Ward and R.P. Stephen Davis joined Roy Dickens in publishing further findings, which are invaluable in improving our knowledge of the Saura Native Americans.

Based on these excavations, it now seems that Native American populations existed along the banks of the Dan River and its tributaries for thousands of years prior to European settlement of North Carolina. Researchers identify what is referred to as the Dan River phase of occupation, which extends from at least A.D. 1000 until about 1450. These settlements formed linear communities along the river and stream banks during the early part of this phase, but later condensed into more compact groups as indicated by the presence of protective palisades (a fence of stakes set closely together).

The Sauratown phase of occupation is assigned a time period beginning in 1450 and extending until the Sauras' departure from the Dan River valley around 1710. Although these two cultures differ in title, similarities in pottery styles and other artifacts suggest an uninterrupted connection between the Dan River and early Sauratown phase occupants. This latter phase is divided into early, middle, and late subphases, generally coinciding with periods of increasing European contact.

The early Sauratown phase (1450 - 1620), encompasses the time span of early European exploration of North America. So far, archeological evidence does not support the existence of an established trade connection between the Sauras and early explorers. However, changes in village placement continued during this period, as the Sauras continued to consolidate into fewer sites along the junction of the Dan River and its tributaries.

During the middle Sauratown phase (1620 - 1670), new trade routes opened up between early European settlements and various Piedmont Native American tribes. Still, it appears that face-to-face contact between the Sauras and traders was rare and had little impact on their culture. Unlike other Native American tribes, it is also possible that the Sauras had not yet experienced the devastation of disease epidemics introduced through European contact.

The late Sauratown phase (1670 - 1710) culminates with the departure of the tribe from the Dan River valley. Much of our understanding of this phase comes from excavations made just downstream of the Upper Sauratown site in Stokes County, which researchers believe may have been the final village site of the Sauras in this region. Unlike other phases, evidence